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SUBJECT: GOR GREETINGS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM DIRECTOR BLOOMFIELD
WITH OPEN ARMS

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Classified By: DCM Eric Rubin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: During a visit to Moscow from January 29 - February 4, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) Director Sarah Bloomfield received an enthusiastic response from GOR officials, who noted that the GOR and the USHMM have shared interests in expanding World War II and Holocaust education. USHMM representatives hope to announce a series of bilateral projects as part of Russia's Victory Day celebration in May. Despite the obvious shared interests in this area, we should be alert to the possibility that the GOR will attempt to exploit the issue of Nazi collaborators in Ukraine and the Baltic countries to push its own geopolitical goals in the former Soviet space. End Summary.

USHMM proposes closer cooperation to GOR

¶2. (SBU) During a visit to Moscow from January 29 - February 4, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) Director Sarah Bloomfield met with a wide cross-section of over twenty academics, NGOs, federal archive agencies, and GOR officials. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) is a federal agency, funded by Congress, and its Director, Sarah Bloomfield, is directly appointed by the President in a manner similar to Cabinet members. Although Russia has a Holocaust Memorial Synagogue and other Holocaust-related organizations, it has nothing comparable to the USHMM. The primary goal of Bloomfield's trip was therefore to bring bilateral cooperation on Holocaust-related projects to the government level and out of the NGO realm. The percentage of Russian participants in the USHMM's work has thus far been low; out of the 400 scholars who have had fellowships there, only two have been Russian. Furthermore, the cooling of U.S.-Russian relations prior to 2009 led GOR agencies, including archival ones, to cut off cooperation with the USHMM.

¶3. (C) Information about Nazi crimes on Soviet soil forms a key part of the USHMM's collection, and includes not only Jews who were Soviet citizens, but also Slavic forced laborers and Soviet prisoners-of-war. Bloomfield's deputy Paul Shapiro noted that, ironically, due to a lingering Cold War mentality on the part of some GOR officials, the USHMM has enjoyed a closer cooperative relationship with a former U.S. adversary, Germany, than with its former ally, Russia.

Common ground on falsification of history

¶4. (C) Bloomfield and Shapiro were quick to point out to GOR officials that the lack of Russian scholars at the USHMM was detrimental to Russia's interests. Other former Soviet countries all participate, and have the opportunity to put their own spin on events that occurred during World War II, which differ from the views of Russians. Shapiro told GOR

officials that the USHMM shared Russia's concerns about "distortion of history" (reftel) and exoneration or even celebration of Nazi collaborators in places such as Ukraine and the Baltics. Shapiro also noted that the improved bilateral atmosphere, which can only be enhanced by commemorating our World War II alliance against the Nazis, provides a golden opportunity for collaboration on joint projects.

15. (C) Bloomfield and Shapiro found an extremely enthusiastic audience among their GOR interlocutors. Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov agreed that "we have to focus on this tragic period of our history," and noted that the commemoration of the Red Army liberation of Auschwitz (a ceremony which Bloomfield attended, and where Russian Education Minister Fursenko inaugurated a pavilion devoted to the liberation) had just taken place on January 27. Bloomfield pointed out that many Americans are not aware that it was the Red Army, not the Americans, who liberated Auschwitz (as well as five other Nazi killing centers), and that this was emblematic of the need to include Russia more in Holocaust education. Ryabkov cited the example of Ambassador Beyrle's father, who fought for both the U.S. and the Red Army during World War II, as an example of the kind of story that needs to be shared with the public so that they can understand the partnership of our two countries during that time. Ryabkov suggested focusing media attention on any joint projects, and added, "the more we can do on this subject, the better," as we should always remember that we were allies for this event, which "for us, is a cherished part of our history." He also agreed that it was "obvious" that a broader partnership of Russian scholars with the USHMM

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would enhance the chances of bringing people's understanding of history as close to the truth as possible.

Archivists ready to cooperate as well

16. (C) Shapiro asked Ryabkov about the obstructionism among some GOR officials in recent years regarding the USHMM's access to archival materials. Ryabkov responded that it would be necessary to find a way to eliminate bureaucratic obstacles to address "the very un-bureaucratic issues" related to the Holocaust. Given that, as Shapiro noted, archival materials form the backbone of the USHMM's work, no joint projects with Russia will be able to get off the ground without approval from GOR archival agencies. These agencies have had a mixed record of cooperation with the USHMM; Bloomfield and Shapiro have been in regular contact with Sergey Mironenko, Director of the State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF), while still only sharing a limited amount of information. Two years ago, the FSB's archival wing, without explanation, cut off all contact with the USHMM. To help resolve this question, Bloomfield met separately with Dr. Andrey Artizov, Director of the Federal Archival Agency of the Russian Federation, and with Mironenko. Artizov (whose Agency supervises GARF's work) and Mironenko both expressed readiness to work with any of Bloomfield's ideas. Shapiro emphasized these agencies' key role in any bilateral projects, and added that one of the most fundamental sources of information on Nazi crimes on Soviet territory is the documents from the Soviet Union's Extraordinary Committee.

17. (C) After a week of meetings with GOR officials to discuss modes of collaboration, the head of the FSB's archival division, Vasiliy Khristoforov, unexpectedly appeared during a meeting at the MFA with Mikhail Shvydkoy, the Special Cultural Representative of President Medvedev, and proved to be affable and amenable to Bloomfield and Shapiro's suggestions. Nonetheless, in order to re-start the relationship with the FSB, Ryabkov suggested that the USHMM begin by sending small list of cases to Ryabkov, who could then pass them along. They could then gradually add in more

and more cases as trust continued to improve.

The nitty-gritty

18. (C) Bloomfield and Shapiro presented a series of specific ideas to their GOR interlocutors. Shapiro suggested three joint bilateral projects in advance of the May Victory Day commemoration: one archival project; one roundtable of scholars; and one publishing project. These could concern both Jewish victims and Soviet forced laborers. Ryabkov noted that the events in May would involve foreign delegations, parades, and other commemorations, and agreed with Bloomfield that jointly signing a memorandum of understanding on the above projects would make an appropriate public gesture of cooperation in this context.

19. (C) Shapiro proposed, in addition to the above ideas, a digitization project which would make all Extraordinary Committee documents available both here and in Washington. Artizov said that it would not be necessary to move this to Washington, as they have state of the art materials here. (Note: This statement has some basis; the Bloomfield group later toured GARF's new state-of-the-art facilities, which have just undergone a USD 16.7 million renovation. End note.). Artizov said that they should discuss how much the American side could fund, and then look at the budget and hammer out the details (including which part of the digitization would take place in-house, and which part would be outsourced). Bloomfield assured Artizov that this project would be a priority. Artizov suggested drawing up an agreement and signing it on the eve of Victory Day. For his part, Mironenko said that they had a thorough collection from SVAG (the Soviet Military Administration in Germany), which they had developed in cooperation with the German Bundesarchive; however, this project had taken ten years to complete. Artizov also said he was interested in YIVO and Yad Vashem documents. Shapiro also suggested having Russia join the International Task Force on Holocaust Education and Research.

10. (C) During the meetings, Shvydkoy said that he was planning to designate 2012 as "the year of Russia" in the U.S., and vice versa in Russia. He added that "our Presidents require from us evidence and facts of the 'reset.'" Shvydkoy also invited Bloomfield and Shapiro to two conferences in Moscow in April: one of Russian and American historians, and one of historians of post-Soviet countries

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(which will touch on the Holocaust). Ramzan Koloyev of the Ministry of Culture, told Bloomfield that his Ministry was also interested in taking part in bilateral activities in this sphere. He mentioned the Bilateral Presidential Commission Working Group on culture, which entails joint cooperation between museums and libraries in both countries. Koloyev said that a Russian cultural delegation of 10-12 people plans to visit the U.S. in March as a reciprocal visit to Undersecretary McHale's visit in December.

11. (C) Because of Bloomfield's desire to put the weight of the GOR behind any joint projects, the trip focused on establishing, or re-establishing, relationships at the governmental level. However, she also met with a number of academics and NGOs, without whose work none of the symbolically important events could happen. Andrey Roginskiy showed Bloomfield the impressive archival collection belonging to his NGO Memorial, although only the portion relating to Soviet forced laborers during the war (so-called "ostarbeiters") touched directly upon the USHMM's work. Bloomfield and Shapiro also spoke with Aaron Zusman of the Organization of Victims of Fascist Camps and Ghettos, himself a survivor of Nazi atrocities who has organized a number of former victims within Russia.

12. (U) Bloomfield and Shapiro also spoke with professor

Arkadiy Kovelman, head of the Department of Jewish studies at Moscow State University, regarding possible research, information, and scholar programs for his students at the USHMM; with Mark Kupovetskiy of the Russian-American Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies at the Russian State University of the Humanities (RGGU), regarding collaborative development of online databases; and Isaac Frumin, Vice Rector at the Higher School of Economics (HSE), regarding possible research exchange and fellowship programs. HSE's and RGGU's field work involving personal interviews of survivors or witnesses from World War II sparked particular interest from the USHMM side. They also visited the Moscow Choral Synagogue, the Solomon Mikhoels Cultural Center, and the Holocaust Memorial Synagogue. Although GOR contacts will provide necessary heft to any joint projects, many of these people will make substantive behind-the-scenes contributions to any publicized bilateral activities to promote Holocaust awareness.

Possible pitfalls

¶13. (C) Bloomfield and Shapiro were pleased to be on the same page with their Russian interlocutors. However, their conversation with Mironenko about some of the political aspects of this initiative provided a reality check for them about potential pitfalls, and optics that may not be in USG interests. When Shapiro asked if the joint digital project would fit in with Medvedev's Victory Commission, Mironenko answered that for the 60th anniversary, there was a Central Committee called "Victory" which still exists on paper, but he derided the Committee as "pompous" and empty of substance. The context was "parades and such," with little relation anything academic or substantive.

¶13. (C) Mironenko also spoke archly of the Anti-Falsification Commission (of which he and Artizov are technically members, although Mironenko only prepares information for it) that Medvedev created in May 2009 (reftel), damning it with faint praise. He said that it has thus far met twice, but "cannot decide what direction to take." He said that it was good that the Commission is stimulating research, and said may be interested in funding this, but he also made it clear that he had little respect for the majority of the Commission's members, who appear to be focusing on scoring political points, and to have shallow scholarly knowledge. Any funding that a bilateral project received from the Commission would thus be tainted with politics. Artizov told Bloomfield: "We are not trying to politicize the archives; that is not our mandate. But when fascist collaborators are getting honors, we can't sit idly by."

Comment

¶14. (C) Artizov's sentiment on fascist collaborators is one GOR officials commonly express on the subject of World War II and the Holocaust. Despite our obvious shared history as allies who defeated the Nazis, the GOR takes a radically different approach toward the problems and complexities of twentieth-century history in the USSR's former sphere of influence. Bloomfield is correct that the USHMM and the GOR have a shared agenda in ensuring that the full truth of this collaboration is known, and that such mutually important

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topics will add to the warming trend in bilateral relations. But while the USHMM wishes to air the truth in order to hold Nazi collaborators to account and in order to help ensure that nothing like the Holocaust occurs again, the GOR has at times shown an inclination to politicize this issue in order to silence critics of Russian actions before, during, and after World War II. We should encourage the USHMM's initiative while remaining alert to attempts by the GOR to manipulate the issue for its own purposes.
Beyrle